10. The War of Interpretation

We teach that we cannot interpret on our own

In the previous reading, I discussed a fundamental, abstract matrix underlying the traditional Literature class in Uruguay's secondary education system. But as the reader might imagine, that was not my only interest. It was an intellectually engaging challenge—and above all, a pastime—but if my intelligence were confined to analyzing theoretical aspects of how a classroom functions, I would find it disappointing. Therefore, in this final reading of the 2025 cycle, I aim to expand the epistemological model of joint attribution and use the concept of "interpretation" to explain human behaviors that go beyond the academic realm.

If I spoke of "rectorship" and defined it within the framework of a guiding figure in the process of joint interpretation, it is because, at least in the traditional classroom, it is clear that in matters of interpretation, the one being guided is faced with an authority figure to be respected—because, and this is crucial—the teacher knows more than they do. And this is not merely a banal statement. It is also a declaration of principle.

With the current emphasis on claiming rights (as of 2025), collectives are gaining power, and that power is often used to exercise the rights of those encompassed by such groups—yet with little or no interest in fulfilling the corresponding obligations. As a result, the qualifications required to access a job may simply amount to having a particular skin color, a specific form of genitality, or a given sexual behavior. In the same vein, within domains such as subject supervision and curriculum design, students are increasingly granted power, while the teacher's authority is steadily diminished. The adoption of a horizontal classroom structure undermines the teacher's position out of fear of exposure, accusations of authoritarianism, or being associated with outdated teaching methods. Thus, the repeated claim that "students also know" erodes the model, insofar as it removes the rector from their central role as mediator.

But in the model of the teacher-rector that I have been developing, the rector is indispensable. And while it is true that they must work with the students' experiential and cultural background, it is equally true that, in matters of interpretation, the rector is the one who knows the most. And we must not lose sight of this, because the opposing view "softens" the formal educational system to such an extent that it risks turning it into a caricature of itself.

On another level—a deeper one—it must be acknowledged that what we teach in the traditional Literature class is that we are not free to interpret just anything. Because, in fact, we control the creation of meaning. And that teaching is essential so that, when we extrapolate and insist upon it, we shape human beings who are cautious in their interpretation outside the classroom, establishing a rule, an analytical verisimilitude to—nothing more and nothing less—govern our personal reading of reality. Or, to use the terms I have been developing: to draw imago mundi within our selfspheres.

Why are we immersed in a war of interpretation?

What is love? What is success? What is happiness? Which activity constitutes a waste of time and which does not? The way we answer these questions will determine how we generally guide our behavior. And these answers originate from how we interpret reality. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, and it may not even be controversial, but the problem lies in how personal these answers truly are. A further step in this regard is what happens when the way we respond to these questions is radically different from the way another person answers them—and we are forced to deal with that difference

(and with that person). One of the clearest arenas where this is seen is in the problem of interpreting what love is.

Two people who—although not necessarily with words, it is understood—define their experiences and expectations of love differently in practice, can indeed begin a romantic relationship. Each time one of them says "I love you", the phrase is not understood according to what the speaker believes it means, but rather according to what the other person believes it means.

In a romantic relationship, human beings often place hopes on the construction of "success". By this, I mean that ordinarily we consider having a healthy romantic relationship as part of success in life. But the partner is also sometimes used as a means to achieve other aspects of success, such as economic well-being. If two people who have different understandings of what success in life means enter into a relationship, that discrepancy can become a major cause of fracture.

There is a war over the imposition of interpretations of reality because interpretations of reality are reality. That is to say, the way we give shape to reality is our reality. Subsequently, by using these interpretations as prejudices, we read the reality that comes to us through the lens of a pre-shaped morphology, a drawing already made. And this happens because it is necessarily easier to respect what has already been formed than to erase it and start again. That is why imposing interpretations is so important—because the imposition of interpretations distributes power.

This is also why, at the beginning of a relationship, it is natural for both parties to try to discern whether the other truly serves the purpose they need. A certain re-education may be required. Then, if the judgment yields a positive result—either because the other is already suitable, or because they are deemed "reformable"—a process of re-education, of reform, will begin, aiming to mold the other to one's personal needs. But such reform is only effective through successive victories in the field of interpretation, in a constant friction that can only be explained through the dynamics of domination and the presence of the hostage.

A mention of inclusive language

Interpretations such as the idea that language renders women invisible reveal the existence of distinct analytical frameworks for reading reality. Thus, an interpretation of reality is capable of modifying not only the way we express ourselves but also the way we think and relate to others.

In our language, the masculine form has traditionally been accepted as generic. We say, "Los alumnos deberán presentar cédula" ("The students must present their ID"). However, after the rise of skepticism toward the use of this generic masculine, we began saying "los alumnos y las alumnas" ("male and female students"); and more radically, "les alumnes" (a gender-neutral form).

It is nothing more and nothing less than a pair of conflicting interpretations of reality that can be summarized as follows:

"It is not necessary to refer to other genders in speech because the masculine is generic in Spanish. This does not constitute an act of discrimination".

And:

"It is necessary to refer to other genders in speech because, although traditionally the masculine is generic in Spanish, it renders invisible and denies the diverse varieties of gender, which constitutes an act of discrimination".

To such an extent is the way we interpret the world important that it even moves the foundations of our linguistic expression, and with it, our very thought. Moreover, in the comparison of images within the selfspheres, it also functions as a password—distinct strategies of ideological affiliation that, if they exist, create bonds, and if they do not, destroy them through complicity or secret aversions.

The imposition of interpretation and the cowardly acceptance of the tutelage of the "self"

I admit that few things irritate me more than detecting an attitude of dominance linked to the imposition of interpretation. In fact, expressing oneself in that way contains a fundamental error: the imposition of interpretation itself is always an act of dominance.

Thus, we have all at some point encountered that skeptical relative or friend who, nonetheless, subscribes to "conspiracy theories" (forgive the vulgarity) or popular narratives that twist facts until it appears that the rest of us are naive, simply believing whatever we are told to believe. So, if we say that July 16 marks the anniversary of humanity's arrival on the Moon, they will respond with a sarcastic smile, clearly pleased with themselves: "And you actually believed that story? It's been proven to be a hoax". Likewise, they will always find a way to impose their perspective on any matter, making it clear that, unlike someone who accepts everything they are told without question, they question and know things.

Another common—and no less irritating—variant is the tendency to cast a pre-established and supposedly truthful narrative over any given fact, as if it were a form of therapy. This narrative grants healing power to the one who controls it, and strips it from the one who does not. What shamans and priests did for centuries is now also done by psychologists, coaches, and astrologers—as well as by a whole host of unscrupulous individuals who rely on a kind of knowledge that invariably demands the passive acceptance of the tutelage of the "self".

Because we already know that our interpretation of reality is radically controlled.

The more deeply you are subjected to this logic, the more you will want to defend it—because, as I have said elsewhere, for someone to point out the flaw in the drawing of your imago mundi is to make you acknowledge that you are being clumsy and dominated by an external force. In other words: that you are weak.

That is why anyone who dares to rail against alternative therapies, the weekly session with a psychotherapist, or even the militant enthusiasm of the current political group unconditionally supporting a leader—or, worse still, a beloved combination of colors (yes, things are that bad, that bad)—anyone who dares to go against these great pillars of existence will be sentenced to the hell of judgment as ignorant and cast out of the Eden of Ordered Reality.

To transcend vulgar interpretations

Perhaps the most brutal and clumsy—and therefore vulgar—way of interpreting reality is to divide it into two abstract realms, each responsible for distinguishing groups of people associated with them. I am referring to the abstract realms of good and evil.

Thus, interpreting reality (which is the same as saying giving it form, morphologizing it within ourselves) through the filter of absolute goodness and evil is strikingly naive. But that naivety is entrenched, protected by a shell of vulgarity—a kind of continuous use, or intersubjective bridge, that enables immediate and transcendent communication and communion beyond the self.

Just as absurdity does not exist in reality—since reality is always strictly rational—evil does not exist either, because it would be absurd. If someone wishes harm upon another person and is even capable

of taking actions to that end, it is certain that something motivates that desire: a personal gain, an aspiration to thrive through another's failure, or even the wish to avoid being exposed in one's own mediocrity.

That is why it is both curious and laughable when, in a work of fiction, we immediately try—because we have been taught to do so since early childhood—to identify who is "the good one" and who is "the bad one". A kind of moral compass is then activated which, unless an ironic or detached reading intervenes, will always guide us by pointing to the extremes of goodness and evil, where the characters are assigned their respective roles.

From this supine vulgarity of the interpretive dynamic, the fracture spreads throughout the entire imago, creating "good" and "bad" figures everywhere—religions, politicians, athletes, actors, acquaintances, colleagues, friends, family members. The imago displays a strange center parting, typical of those who suffer from the worst kind of laziness: the laziness of thought.

And no one will tell me they don't exist. No one can, because I have seen them. I have spoken with them, and they have even admitted it to me—sometimes as one admits to a furtive pleasure, and other times proudly, openly declaring their discovery that "thinking is bad".

Related to the above, another vulgar interpretation to transcend is the idea that fiction serves as a historical record. Fiction, as Saer once said, demands to be regarded as fiction, and it is from that stance that it reveals truths. But understanding the Trojan War through a movie is, to say the least, reckless. Another example is the so-called biopics. There, you find scholars of private lives, repeating unverifiable "truths" about characters who can no longer defend themselves. Ask Mozart about that, if you will.

The list of vulgar interpretations to transcend is immense, because we are very vulgar when it comes to interpreting. It is far easier—much easier—to follow a path already laid out than to take the trouble to think for ourselves. It is much simpler to find a leader and stop there.

Another kind of vulgar interpretations that would deserve extensive analysis are what are commonly—and somewhat crudely—called "prejudices". I put the term in quotation marks because, to be honest, we do navigate the world by means of prejudices—that is, prior judgments—but we tend to reserve the term exclusively for those judgments that seem unfair or (worse) irrational to someone. Examples abound: if he is a man, he likes soccer; if he is Uruguayan, he drinks mate; if she is a woman, she drives poorly; if she is blonde, she is dumb; if he is from Buenos Aires, he is arrogant; if she is beautiful, she is superficial; if he is friendly, he has a sexual interest; if he is elderly, he is wise; if the product is Chinese, it is bad—and a long list of foolish stereotypes into which I shall not delve, so as not to diminish the quality of my analysis.

I will only say that prejudices, as inductive learnings, are indispensable. But those prejudices we specifically label as "prejudices" are simply interpretive vulgarities that openly expose undeveloped intellects lacking any aesthetic sense of reality.

And what about the value of one's own lifetime?

Once—rightly so—someone said to me, in response to my constant critical attitude toward the knowledge imparted in a rather challenging subject like Linguistics, "My time is valuable". And since I confess to having a memory that is little short of prodigious, especially when it comes to events that embarrass me, today, twenty years later, I remember that episode as if it had happened yesterday.

My classmate was right: her time was valuable, and I was slowing down the class. While I had the right to participate and ask questions, challenging the content often becomes an intolerable excess—especially for those who lack critical skills. But it was an inevitable stage in my intellectual development. I did not wish to waste anyone's time; I enjoyed my own intelligence and how it interacted with the teacher's discourse, which painstakingly presented theoretical and even epistemological elements developed by great linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson.

The value of one's lifetime is immeasurable. No one can deny it. If there is a good that stands above all others (since without it none can be enjoyed), it is life itself. Therefore, it is natural to ask whether we are being subtly but systematically convinced otherwise—that our time is something to be wasted. Ask average people (among whom I do not count myself, of course, which is why I make these videos) what they would do if they had an income sufficient to cover their obligations without needing to work, and if, based on that economic well-being, they could truly do whatever they wanted with their lives. Many would say they would travel. But many others would admit to devoting themselves to complete and unchanging inactivity.

This idea—which may well be a simple vulgar fantasy reflecting what people are expected to say—demonstrates that we do not sufficiently value our time. The same happens when we consider the not-so-uncontroversial notion of "entertainment". Whoever accepts that they must be "entertained" implicitly accepts that their time is worthless because they do not know how to use it, because, deep down, they do not know why or for what purpose they live beyond a mysterious act of biological chance.

An important reason someone might want to convince us that our lifetime is not very valuable is cultural consumption. The less we believe our time is worth as consumers—whether as spectators in any of the many forms—the more inclined we are to settle for less. There comes a point when we become incapable of seeing the poverty of what is offered to us because we have been trained to accept that mediocrity. Artistic productions, sporting events, video games, television broadcasts and audiovisual content across various platforms, concerts, theater plays, and trendy movies—all quality declines, standardizes, and levels off in degradation to become digestible to the anesthetized and ephemeral appetite of the majority.

From metaphorical opacity and formal complexity to babbling and the most abject vulgarity, the entertainment producer develops the most varied permutations around the theme of vulgarity. The spectator settles for little, or worse, lowers their expectations by educating their taste, shaping it according to what is imposed upon them to consume. And they consume it gladly, falling into the clutches of the market and savoring the growing ordinariness of their soul.

Because they need to be entertained; because if they are not, they get bored, don't know what to do, feel out of place, excluded from the world. And who wants to feel excluded from the world? If my time is worthless, I can waste it all I want. I have every right, don't I? And if my time is worthless, neither is my life.

Another sphere in which the undervaluation of our own time gives others an advantage over us is the workplace. The less we believe our time is worth, the more willing we are to exchange it for a miserable wage. We may feel the transaction isn't so unfair—or perhaps we don't even have the luxury to think about it—pressed by debts and unavoidable obligations, which, having accepted them or been convinced of their necessity, we have effectively mortgaged nothing less than our own lives.

The ubiquitous offer of leadership

We must be wary not only of false prophets but of anyone who seeks to impose an interpretation of reality—even myself. Anyone who does so assumes an attitude of dominance. Thinking for ourselves is

not merely a beautiful idea; it touches upon the most sacred aspect of personality: independence of thought and the serene, discerning examination of reality. We must be very cautious when accepting any interpretation of reality without subjecting it to the judgment of reason.

When we accept one interpretation, through an obvious domino effect, we accept others that accompany it. That subjective ordering can even influence future judgments as prejudices. Perhaps we are not fully aware of the seriousness of this problem, but the time we take to convince ourselves of its gravity is time that, as Seneca said, already belongs to death.[1]

[1] Did you notice the paradox? If you accept my interpretation of reality, you accept my rectorship and submit to my attitude of dominance. But my interpretation of reality consists in that you must think for yourself, since independence of thought is sacred. Therefore, if you think for yourself, you are thinking according to my rectorship. If you think according to my rectorship, you are not thinking for yourself.